

Support the bay-delta rescue

BY ROSEMARY KAMEI

It has scarcely stopped raining and water is once again a hot topic in California. Water drives everything else here, and the current water focus is CALFED, the state-federal process that is trying to fix the state's water problems in the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta.

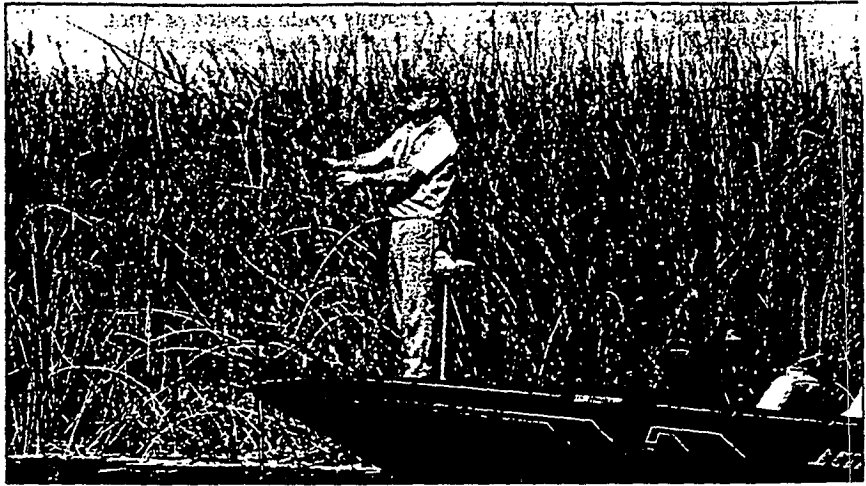
If you drink water, eat fruits and vegetables, care about the environment or depend on a strong state and local economy, this is an issue that deserves your attention. The bay-delta provides more than half of Santa Clara County's water. It is the main source of supply for three-quarters of all Californians, and provides irrigation for almost half the state's produce.

The problem is that the bay-delta is in danger of failing — soon. Decades of human activity have endangered several species of fish and raised water quality concerns for people and wildlife alike. In addition, levees, the barriers between fresh and salt water in the delta, are increasingly vulnerable to failure from high runoff or earthquakes.

The bay-delta's complex problems took years to develop, and there's no quick or easy solution to them. However, CALFED is involving all interested parties — the public, water agencies, business, agriculture and environmental groups — to craft a workable restoration plan. And unlike previous proposals to repair the delta, CALFED has placed environmental needs at the center of discussion.

Public hearing

The CALFED public hearing will be held today at the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors Chambers, 70 West Hedding Street, San Jose. Informal Q&A begins at 6 p.m. followed by the hearing at 7 p.m. For information, call CALFED at 1-800-700-5752, or consult the CALFED Web site at <http://www.calfed.water.ca.gov>. You can also call Amy Fowler at the Santa Clara Valley Water District, (408) 265-2607, ext. 2064.



MERCURY NEWS FILE PHOTOGRAPH

The rich resources of the bay-delta region are at stake.

CALFED is reviewing proposals that address water supply, water quality and the bay-delta environment. They include innovative ideas like the "open water market" recently proposed by leading corporate CEOs. CALFED has released three alternative plans for public review, now through July 1.

Today, Silicon Valley has its chance to comment on these plans at a public hearing (details below). We should ask CALFED to meet these bottom-line needs for Santa Clara County.

■ **High water quality.** County residents and businesses demand a safe, clean, high-quality water supply. The Santa Clara Valley Water District is upgrading its drinking water purification plants to an ozonation process to meet new quality standards. Such standards will likely become increasingly stringent and harder to meet by treatment alone. Silicon Valley industries have invested in further treatment processes, such as reverse osmosis, to meet product demands. Improving the quality of our source water from the delta is crucial to overall water quality improvements for consumers, high-tech businesses, increased water recycling and our environment.

■ **A supply we can rely on.** In the future, we will continue to rely on imported water from the bay-delta for more than half of our water supply, even with increased conservation and recycling. Imported supplies were uncertain during the 1987-92 drought, which wasn't good for our local econ-

omy. CALFED is our best hope for restoring stability to imported supplies.

■ **Equity and affordability.** Clearly, any solution to the bay-delta's huge problems will not be cheap. But local users of imported water, residents and businesses alike, deserve the most cost-effective plan possible. In addition, the benefits of any solution need to be allocated equitably. Bay-delta ecosystem restoration should begin along with water quality and supply improvements, so that all interests can gain from the process simultaneously.

■ **Environmental improvements.** Bay-delta ecosystem restoration is at the heart of each CALFED alternative. This approach is radically different from earlier attempts to improve the bay-delta and deserves to be supported. However, CALFED restoration efforts should also be directed toward the South Bay. After all, we are part of the same bay-delta ecosystem.

The opportunity to save the bay-delta is now. The CALFED process deserves our support, and our expectations for success. If CALFED fails to arrive at a workable solution, the fish, the farmers and the cities all lose, including San Jose and Santa Clara County. Our water supply, our quality of life, and our continued prosperity depend on a successful outcome.

Rosemary Kamei is a member of the Santa Clara Valley Water District board of directors and of the CALFED Bay-Delta Advisory Committee.